

## Against the Grain

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# Back Talk -- Today's Academic Library: Student Centered and Convenient

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lated tagging structures that are being developed. The W3C launched an Augmented Reality Community Group last summer to delve into these issues. That group is focused on a combination of hardware sensors, open APIs, and principles of the Open Web Platform. Whether a Web-based model makes the most sense is an open question, but it is not an inappropriate place to start. This is similar in principle to the rationale behind EPUB 3 being based upon HTML5 and CSS 3. In all likelihood, the majority of the publishing community will not be leading these initiatives, but rather reacting to trends in the tech marketplace. However, agile publishers monitoring this work could engage in shaping the work, planning for its integration in information delivery, and be ahead of the curve.

There are skills that the publishing and information distribution communities could bring to bear on AR. In particular, the focus on discovery of information and facilitating its discovery through metadata, ontologies, and other forms of discovery services is an area where libraries have long been the experts. Another important area of leadership and expertise that the publishing and library communities have is in ensuring that content in these new forms is accessible to people with disabilities, archivable, and migratable from one technology platform to the next. In part, this ties back to the point about creating well-structured content. But it goes deeper to an understanding of the need to be “interoperable with the future,” as **Evan Owens** frequently emphasized when he was managing the **Portico** preservation systems.

The world of augmented reality isn't that far away for many publishers. Being able to operate, succeed, and contribute to that developing environment should be a welcome opportunity for many publishers. Knowing what is coming and how to incorporate it into existing and future content will be key to succeeding. Learning from lessons gained in electronic publishing could position current online publishers ahead of other content creators who are still inching their way out of the print world. 🌱

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ies for students: repurposed libraries to include learning commons services and layout; more eBooks; selecting the best of the Web to match course needs; digitizing valuable special collections materials; self-check circulation; user-initiated ILL and purchasing programs; making information and services easier to use anywhere, anytime by putting them in the cloud; hiring more staff for online services; developing mobile device content and services; and providing library social networking services.

There are also a number of trends which are not especially student-centered or designed to make library content and services more convenient to use: sharing specialist staff positions with other institutions; closing down reference collections; collaborating with other programs on campus which are more research than student focused; support for institutional repositories; helping faculty with intellectual property issues; switching from AACR@ to RDA for cataloging; outsourcing as much technical processing as possible; mainstreaming special collections processing; and librarian hand-wringing over its loss of its role as the guardian of the academy's intellectual output. It isn't that following these trends won't have value, but they are not likely to readily receive user support — they run the risk of being seen as more examples of librarians fussing about things important to them but not to the university's teaching and learning goals.

Well, I am sure I will have a great time in Taiwan eating wonderful food and seeing delightful sights, but I am not sure all of these global [read Western] trends will be received with great enthusiasm. Yet, if they want to be seen as “with it” libraries, they may still have to adopt them to play globally. 🌱

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# Back Talk — Today's Academic Library: Student Centered and Convenient

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I was recently asked to go to Taiwan to speak about academic library trends in the age of globalization. I readily accepted for two big reasons: First, it would take me back to a wonderful part of the world where I lived for several years in my late teens and for shorter periods over the past 45 or so years. Second, it would give me an opportunity to take an overall look at these trends. Working as a librarian is a bit like the work of a lumberjack; you spend your life working on individual trees, or even a large stand of trees, but seldom take the time to stand on a high mountaintop to survey the forests as a whole.

In addition to reviewing western library trends, my talk will discuss the concept of globalization, which is the concept that the world is undergoing a process where everything is becoming standardized irrespective of local differences. The upside of this process is that it enables global actors to control costs and make more money. The downside is that local needs are ignored since they are not marketable globally. This process has been going on for a very long time. As most of *ATG's* readers are westerners, we are only too familiar with the need for standards like ISO, AACR2, and international copyright agreements. These seemingly make sense — unless you happen to be operating in a country where the problems of illiteracy, unreliable electricity, the need for local language information resources, and the lack of Internet connectivity are the most important ones with which to deal. I still remember talking during the mid-70s to a library director in Taiwan who was dealing with student complaints about the lack of Chinese language scientific re-

search materials, even though there were plenty of Chinese scientists doing research. He told the students that if they could identify relevant Chinese language titles, the library would readily buy them. But, the problem was that science was largely being published in the *global* language of English.

As a North American who has worked both in the U.S. and Asia, another goal for my talk will be to review and make sense of what is happening in academic libraries on the eastern side of the Pacific Ocean.

In this latter context, it has occurred to me that the concepts of “student-centered” and “convenience” are very helpful when explaining what is happening in North America’s libraries. For most, perhaps, the concept that libraries should be “student-centered” is a no-brainer. Yet for me, this has required a change in thinking. In the past, to get librarians to focus on making the faculty happy, I have preached the doctrine that there are two kinds of readers, those who can hurt you, and those that can’t. In the first category is the faculty whose members grow up to be deans, directors, and sometimes even university presidents. In these roles they sit on boards which control the university’s purse strings and can reduce the library’s ability to buy, process, and service its collections. Therefore, I urged, we had to keep them happy by building the collections which they personally wanted but could not afford to purchase; and by keeping their students from making too many complaints about poor collections and unfriendly services.

In the second category were the students. Students spent 4-5 years collecting their union cards and

used the library as the most convenient place to meet their friends and prepare for tests. Traditionally we were able to satisfy these students by making sure the copy machines were filled, by buying lots of reserves collection copies of the books they wanted, and adjusting the air conditioning to keep them comfortable (Yes, I am venting about a topic which has aggravated me over the years).

Now, however, the world has changed. With the advent of electronic information, the internet delivers to faculty offices the information they need for their own research (yes, we pay for much of it) and which they need to illegally/legally feed the students via the internet. When it comes time for students to write papers, it is Google to the rescue, supplemented by several thousand e-journals and eBooks provided and paid for by the library. Consequently, students simply don’t need the physical library as much as they did in the past.

This is where the concept of convenience comes into play. In the February 16 issue of the electronic user-experience focused UX Magazine (<http://uxmag.com/articles/convenience>), **Ari Weissman** has written a very interesting article entitled “Convenience: The third essential of a customer-centric business.” **Weissman** relates several stories which illustrate how convenience is critical in today’s competitive marketplace including how 7-11 stores capitalized on being available when other stores were closed and *Amazon.com*, which now sells nearly everything from auto parts to clothing. He makes a number of suggestions how to make the purchase of one’s services or product line more convenient: reduce the amount of physical effort it takes to get what you have to offer; understand how your customer behaves and then get what you have to offer in the flow of their everyday life; make sure the customer experience you provide encourages the user to “perceive” that it is convenient; and finally, put the customer in charge so that they can control what and when they want to use your services or products.

It doesn’t take much imagination to see how this applies to libraries: we need to reduce the amount of energy patrons have to exert to identify the information which we own and which they need; to make it easier for them to access this information; to make sure the reality of accessing library information is perceived as wonderful; and institute flawless self-service programs so that readers, not library staff members, are running things.

I took a look at my list of top 20 library trends and found that about half of them would enhance the convenience of librar-

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